MEMOIRS AND EXPERIENCES OF ONE DEMENTED.

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RELATED BY HIMSELF.

Written by

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Memoirs and Experiences of an Insane.

I was about twenty years old, as sound and stout a young man, as anyone.

Through an extraordinary overloading of the stomach and through taking cold I became a subject of colic, or what doctors nowadays call appendicitis. At that time the doctors knew little of this frequent disease. They usually called it inflammation of the bowels. So, too, the doctor who attended to my case. In four or five days I was well again and could have followed my work again; but my physician forbade me all labor, even the lightest.

In about six weeks the colic returned, then I had to remain quiet in the rocking chair or in bed. After a few days I gradually improved and felt quite well again. After six weeks the colic returned again, and thus it continued for nine months, and I took medicine continually. The doctor had cut down my diet considerably; I did not dare to eat anything but a little corn mush and crackers and herring, but the herring soon grew too costly for me.

For pass-time I began to read the Bible, commencing at the beginning. Herein I had a special purpose; for I was trying to find out, whether my besetting sin was also mentioned in the Bible. I found it literally, and in close connection the death penalty for it.

If we had not the forgiveness of our sins in the atoning death of Jesus Christ at the cross, how could we poor human beings stand before God! In the nine months of my sickness I had read the Bible pretty well through.

I always liked to sing, but did not dare to, for the mesentery in my abdomen was ruptured. Every Sunday evening we had singing in our house. I usually lay on my bed in an adjoining room. Here I listened to the beautiful choruses from "Schmauk's Harmonie";" that was a feast for me, which I shall never forget. Nevertheless I often fell asleep during the singing, but then I slept sweetly.

Near the close of these nine months I said to my father: Father, I am tired of taking medicine and doing nothing, I shall quit taking medicine and go to work. I did this, but it was too late, for I could not work with ease, but was so excited that I could not go slowly; at every work which I performed I had to keep up a continual trot. But this did not last long. My burden of sins so oppressed me, that I did not know what to do. I went to my father, fell on my knees before him and prayed him to forgive me all my sins committed against him. Then I went into the cellar and prayed to God for the forgiveness of all my sins.

When I went to bed that evening I was not left to myself. Two stout young men were instructed to watch me. I protested, but without avail. My parents sent for the doctor who had attended to me during the summer. But he dared not come near me, for I was angry at him.

The doctor sent for a German surgeon who bled me. But this was also too late. Our minister came, too, and prayed with me.

My disease now developed into raving madness. From that time on I was continually surrounded by my friends more or less, as I raved terribly at times. I said to my people, If you don't want your brother to be a maniac all his life let me go down out of doors. This, of course, they could not permit.

My ravings continued to grow worse; I imagined, I had fathomed God's wisdom, how he had created man, and as I tried to explain this I tore my shirt into shreds. Now it began to rumble in my head; I plainly heard the rattling of the

chains of the dogs of hell and their howling and barking.—That was horrible; I can't compare it with any experience I ever had in my life. Soon after I began to preach in the English language,—about in these words:—Return, ye evil sinners, from your evil ways.

I was kept at home a few days, and then on a beautiful November morning they brought me my best clothes and helped me put them on and made me all sorts of false promises. They asked me, if I did not wish to take a drive with them, to this or that place, and I immediately consented. I here wish to warn never to tell an insane person a falsehood.

We then drove away and they hauled me hither and thither. From time to time one of those excited preaching spells came over me. I would raise myself to a sitting position and would cry out as loud as I could the above mentioned sentence. All people whom we passed on the road appeared as black as negroes in my eyes. — Then I laid myself down again; there I lay and rested as peaceably and better than ever before. We drove on a common farm wagon with three seats on the wagon bed; on every seat two strong men were sitting. Between those six strong men they had made a bed for me, and I had three stout men on each side of me to watch me. The

drive, of course, was to terminate at the Insane Asylum.

On my arrival there they took me to the waiting room. Here we had to wait a short time, then we had to go on further. Arriving in the wards or hall I imagined these were the white halls of New Jerusalem. They took me into Ward No.8 in the second story, into a so-called "strong room". When my people took leave from me they promised me, To-morrow early we shall visit you again. But it was a long time before this visit came.

Whoever wishes to follow me now dare not be too sensitive.

So we are now in the "strong room". This room was about twelve feet square, and of the same hight, and is plastered with ordinary sand, lime and hair, that is, the sides and ceiling. The floor is oiled and very solid. The door is so constructed that one does not notice from which side it opens. In one corner there is a small triangular iron night stool; on the south side a large window with a heavy iron screen on the outside and on the inside a strong wire screen, not unlike the oatscreens in the old thrashing machines. This was my home that time. At meal times they brought me my meals in a tin dish, with spoon, and my coffee in a common pint tincup.

How I spent the first night I have forgotten. But on next morning I lay on the floor and tried to peep through under the door to see one or the other of my people, but without avail. In the hall there were two epileptics, one of whom was a cripple and lame. This one walked to and fro much of the time; thereby his sandals made a peculiar clattering noise. I supposed him to be one of my friends.

The dining room was not very far from my room. At meal times, when the patients were at the table I supposed there were none but my nearest relatives there. I could plainly hear them talk between the clatter of knives and forks. I could even distinguish each one's voice.

Their conversation was about buying the asylum to leave it to the Mennonites for a higher institution of learning, and what was their main object, to liberate me. After discussing the matter a while one of my relatives would say: That would be all right, if we had enough money. This would always be the end of the conversation.

Now the dear readers will follow me back into my "strong room", and to pay close attention to what I have to say about it. As I have already said there is an iron night stool in one corner; this was furnished from the hall outside with

a common chamber wherein there was usually some clear water. I imagined that I was actually in hell; the floor was boiling hot. I began to rave and to tear my clothes, took my coat and tore it into shreds, tore out all the different shades of color. Each shred had a different color. When all was torn from my body I threw everything through the transom over the door. Now a redoubled terror took possession of me; my body seemed to me to be scorched as black as a negroe's through hell fire. I crawled into the straw tick but found no rest. Before long the straw tick was also torn to pieces. It, too, found its way through the transom over the door. Now I was, as it were, in a bin of chaff, like "Jack and the Beanstalk" in the German fable.

One evening after dark three wardens, all dressed in black, came in and each one had a lantern. I took them for the devil's servants, or for Freemasons, which at that time meant about the same to me. They were sent by the doctors, however, to use a syringe on me. These black fellows took a hold of me and I resisted with all my might, but finally they brought me to the floor so that they could do their work.

The next day when the operation began to take effect I went to the iron stool and looked in. There the reflection from

the clear water (mentioned above) appeared to me as the eye of God, or Jacob's Well, and nothing in the world could have induced me to use the stool.

Directly overhead from the stool on the ceiling there was a place which had different color from the rest of the ceiling. I often looked at this spot and it seemed to me that our minister (who was already dead at that time) would say to me, Look here once, see how much I have suffered on earth, and you want to complain over the little pain you have to suffer! Thereby a picture of the thumb of a hand appeared very plainly visible. Around the nail of the thumb ran a string or wire in violent velocity as if the last drop of blood should be pressed out, and the nail should slowly be pulled from the thumb.

From that time my condition improved very rapidly, the terror vanished from my mind and instead a sincere gratefulness took possession of me, so that I would sing songs of praise and thanksgiving. I would stand to the window and would begin to sing and cry from a full throat: Hark ten thousand harps and voices etc. All the Swiss and Tyrolien airs and all others which occurred to me, I would sing, and would strike with both fists at the wire screen, which was to represent the harp.

Suddenly my warden stood behind me and inquired, What are you doing here?

I replied, I play the harp with ten thousand strings. Then he queried further: Who showed you this harp? Ans. I found it myself.

Often when I sat on the floor and the sun shone through the big w i n d o w with the l i t t l e p a n e s upon the floor where the reflection would quiver, I thought of the Scripture passage: Our lives are fleeting, alas! how insignificant are all our days, faster than the shuttle in the weaver's loom etc.

Another time I sat on the stool and watched the play of the shadows on the wall. About half way up the wall there was a line extending clear around the room, where the shadings of the wall changed. I thought of the story of Joseph in Egypt in the prison. My imagination took very active part in my thoughts. Meanwhile I kept looking at the ring half way up the wall. Suddenly the ring began to revolve. Now the plates changed into real pictures. Nearly all the animals, as they entered in pairs into the ark of Noah, passed before my view. One pair after another hovered past until up to the window. Here they disappeared.--Finally Pharao's butler and chief baker with his three baskets with baked stuffs on his head came along too.

I now began to improve fast so that I was allowed to leave the "strong room". When I came out the first time I asked

the warden to please let me have writing material to write a letter to my mother. He gave it to me but I was unable to write, for my hands were yet too stiff from the hand cuffs. One nice morning I came into ward No. 7. Here there were many patients, of all kinds of people, several afflicted with epilepsy, but always one a little different from the other. When the disease attacked one, he would fall backwards on the floor, the other forwards, the third simply collapsed as if shot, one would fall into short convulsions, the other struck out in every direction, and a third would bend himself almost into a ball. This condition would last from an hour to ten or more hours. Many would foam and froth from their mouths. But all had this in common, that they shut their hands, particularly their thumbs tight and nearly all would urinate.

More about the other patients. One, a German wagonmaker, named Drake, would walk to the bay window near the hall in the morning as soon as he was dressed. In the floor there was the mark of a branch in a board. Upon this the man would set his left heel and turned his face steadfastly in the direction of the door in the center part of the building which opened to the outside. When the meal bell would ring he would go into the dining room and eat a square meal,

then he would return to the same place and would stand there until the next meal, and so on until bed time. One time the doctor asked me if I would not take the man out for a walk. Thereupon I went to the man, spoke kindly to him, laid my arm into his own, began to start him to and fro, and finally he would take a step forward, then a second one, then a third and gradually he was started to walk. He went a little piece with me, then he tore loose from me as quick as a flash and went back to the branch in the floor.

Another one by the name of Barnes. When this man first came to the asylum I was in ward No. 1. Barnes was also put in there, as he was not dangerous. He would walk the hall back and forth the whole long day from one end to the other in a quickstep. He was a Catholic. In the morning after rising he would kneel down and pray for a long time until the warden came and fetched him to breakfast. Then he sat still at the table and quietly prayed for himself. Being asked why he did not eat he replied: This is forbidden fruit. They let him go for two or three days without eating anything and he kept marching from early till late. Then he was fed by force and he showed a wonderful appetite.

Let us return again to my own history. When I first came into No. 7, there was a

man named Clark there who had swollen feet and legs, so that water sweat from his feet. An old grayhead with wooden leg named Haed told me that he had been hunting in California, and while loading his gun beside a steep rock the load went off and the rammer which had still been in the gun went through his leg. I listened attentively to the old man with the wooden leg. Opposite me on another bench near the bay window sat a big Irishman, Jim Tin, who had one knee resting on the other and was muttering something between his teeth; then he began, as he looked at me sharply: Billy, you were pretty bad this morning. I was not conscious of having harmed him in anyway. Suddenly he arose and came over to me and slapped me sharply on my cheek. Upon asking for explanation he told me that when he had been sick I had come to his room and spit into it. Then it occurred to me that he was right (I had then still been in ward No. 8 and was permitted to come into the small hall. In one of the strong rooms the door was open, I marched in, on the bed on the floor lay our big Irishman. I asked him then if I could help him, I received no answer and as I passed out I came by the iron night stool. I thought, perhaps it will help him if I spit into it, and so I did.

The same day ward No. 5 in the east

wing was vacated by the female inmates. Towards evening we moved into No. 5. I improved rapidly. I helped in the work wherever I could, in the dining-room, in making beds, and scrubbing the floor.

A little before Christmas my eldest brother and a cousin visited me. My brother brought me a new coat. Shortly before New Year my first warden, a true Wuertemberger, visited me in the evening. His name was Fred Walter. He said he had a better voice for beef than for singing. He sat up to me conversing with me and asked me how I was getting along. I replied: My father told us a story about a man who imagined he had a rooster in his head. The doctors could not talk this illusion out of him. Finally one of the doctors struck a lucky idea. They took a real rooster, stuck its head under one wing and rocked it to sleep. Then they went to the patient and asked him if he was willing to be operated on. "Certainly I am", he replied, and they went to work. One of the doctors made a long cut into the patient's scalp, began to press on the head and to draw the opened scalp apart. The other doctor meanwhile held the rooster in readiness, let him fly away over the patient's head, and the man was healed, —until some time later a two-legged ass told the patient of the secret, and then

his imagination returned and the cock could no more be removed from his head.

After relating this experience of mine I told the warden that I was in a similar condition; I still felt that there was something wrong in my head. Shortly after this I became worse again.

If I wished to relate all I remember from my experiences, it would not be quite fit for the public. They desired to keep me in No. 5 until my excited spell should be over; so they put me into a room a little removed from the hall. In this room there were two bedsteads with good bedding, matress, covers and spread. So I began to manage affairs, put the two beds side by side two feet apart, spread the covers over the whole, (I wanted to exercise witchcraft), and laid myself over the hollow between the beds. This was intended to carry me, as I thought, but alas! down I went and lay on the floor. Then it was the old story again; I tore everything from my body and threw it overboard. I got too wild; they had to return me into my "strong room". Then followed six or eight weeks, of which I remember nothing. I must have lain in bed for a long time. One thing I remember; I was out of bed and sat on the iron stool. Then Fredrick Walter came in; I must have insulted him, for he was angry and took hold of

my hair. Then I said, You can't break my neck, for it was already broken once; and thereby I shook my head to show him that I was right. This made him still more angry, he pulled my head down between my knees by the hair and struck it upon the iron stool. My mother told us children the story of Uncle Tom's Cabin. One time, as I remember, I was in my room very sad and played with straw, as if to weave mats. I imagined myself a negro and thought I was Uncle Tom himself.

After this I improved rapidly again. After a short time I was returned into one of the front rooms in No. 1. Here I commenced to work again. By and by I became accustomed to my work again, so that I made sixteen beds complete every morning; that is I also put the spreads on; this I learned to perfection from my Irish warden, Barney McMahon. Then I helped to scrub the floor. About nine o'clock in the morning we were usually done with our housework. Then I enjoyed to go out into the field with the other laborers and worked till noon. But Barney did not like this; he said to me, if he were in my place he would not go out to work at all, for I worked enough in the house; nobody could force me to work, and then he had the right to choose his help among the patients in

his ward, as he was the only warden of No. 1. I intended to follow his advice. Next morning about nine o'clock Mr. Hart, the boss field hand, came and wanted to take me out to the field to cut sod with a small plow. (The sod was cut through into convenient pieces and hauled to the institution. There it was deposited over an inclined bank which was sloped off for the purpose. The sod was laid down there and rolled and watered.) But I did not go along. Soon Mr. Chaselen, the boss farmer, came. Still I did not consent. Then came Dr. Dutle; he made me believe they could find no man beside me who could handle the plow. Then I went along.

A few weeks before this, before we could work in the field, when the days were still short and the nights long, I walked up and down the hall one evening when the lights were already lit, with the coat which my brother had brought me buttoned up to my neck, and sang softly the beautiful hymn: Auserwæhlter Mittler Freund, Nichts soll je von Dir mich scheiden; Ewig, ewig bin ich Dein, Ewig, ewig bist Du mein, Ewig mein, ewig mein, etc. But that was a veritable bliss on earth for me.

When the potatoes and corn planting began I was out every day helping Tom Rork, the hostler, furrow out for potatoes and corn.

About a month before this time two of my brothers wanted to visit me. The doctors told them they could see me but I would not be permitted to see them. My brothers were seated in the doctor's office and looked out through the window. Opposite this window was a door where I went out regularly about 11 o'clock in the forenoon with the warden, to fetch water. Here my brothers could see me. When we had fetched the water, we went into the carpenter shop to fetch sawdust, and then I discovered the rig of my brothers. Now I knew that somebody was here and I expected a visit. I therefore went to the window from where I could watch the rig. Presently the superintendent and my brothers came out and passed only five steps in front of me. My brothers went to the rig and drove away. This insulted me.

To return to the cornfield: It was on Ascension day as we worked in the field, in the forenoon between 10 and 11 o'clock, as four young fellows came marching up, they were my oldest brother and three friends of mine. The same day I was allowed to leave the asylum and to accompany them home.

At home I went to work at once. After harvest in August we paid a visit to the asylum; father, mother, two aunts, three drivers, the school teacher with all

his school children and several young people. About 10 o'clock a. m. we arrived at the place, much too early to visit the institution. We therefore took a stroll through the city. We young people walked along behind, father and the older folks went on ahead, and the school children in the middle. Then I heard the remark that the old man (my father) was a mormon, the three women were his wives and all the others his children.

Later when we arrived in the institution we were yet too early. They sent us up into the tower so as to be out of the way. Later we went through the wards. I had to show my mother the room which I occupied last.

The same year my father died. The following spring, on May 25, my oldest brother and I celebrated a double wedding. In 1868 in the latter part of February I moved to Washington, Iowa, with my family. In March 1870 I took sick again and became demented again. As I had been at the asylum once before I thought I could go back to the institution without much fuss.

The winter of 1869 to 1870 was a so-called open or mud-winter. On March 14, 1870 we had a great snow storm. By this time I took sick. The roads were nearly bottomless; we were 45 to 46 miles from the asylum. In a covered

wagon drawn by four horses they made a bed for me. After they had tied me with ropes wherever they could apply a rope, they lifted me on the wagon. Then we went through snow, ice and mud without end. When I watched the mud - covered wheels from my bed as they revolved slowly I had to think of the passage in the Bible where the prophet speaks of the wheel which was full of eyes all around.

We had to stay over night in a town. But they did not dare take me into the house, but made a lodging for me in the stable. The next day we arrived at the asylum, but they were not permitted to take me in, as we had not the proper papers. The first time I was in the asylum I was there as a private patient; now I had to enter as a charge of the county or the state, as I was too poor. We therefore had to drive all the way back home again. I again lodged in a shanty over night on the way. At home my wife and children were not allowed to see me. They lived in a neighbor's house. After the proper papers had been procured we again drove with four horses through mud and what - not. This time I was admitted to the asylum. The ropes on me were already removed in the waiting room, and then came two wardens, one took me by my left arm and

the other by my right; thus we marched through the wards into No. 3. Here I was again lodged into a "strong room."

My behavior this time was very similar to the first time; only I did not tear my clothes this time, as the wardens took them away from me before I could do that.

I could write much about that time if I should write down all my recollections; will, however, not weary the reader and shall be brief. I was in the asylum during the Franco-Prussian war and the Chicago fire. This time I was in the asylum some over two years. My brother David came to take me home again; it was again about Ascension day when I joined my family again.

As an advice for others I would make this remark: When I first left the asylum I did so with the determination never under any circumstances to go to the asylum again, whether the Bible be truth or not. When I left the second time I believed that I should hold fast to the atonement of Christ at the cross also for me, even though I should come back to the asylum half a dozen times.

May God be gracious to me and may He keep me in this saving faith to the end, which will not be far off.

As an Admonition

I desire to report: Through intemperate eating I contracted a disease which brought me twice into the asylum. A small part of the disease is still lingering in my body, for from time to time I am utterly unfit for any work. When the attacks come hard my understanding is very limited; then I cannot write, even with my best intention and cannot do much of anything else. For this, too, God be praised.

Moundridge, Kans., Aug. 4, 1903.

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